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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 108: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)* (A/52/90, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/348, A/52/437, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/482 and 523; A/C.3/52/3)

1. **Mr. Carriere** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that the war against child labour could be won in all countries in the next 15 years. Governments, employers' and workers' associations as well as civil society had changed their perception of the problem. There was a growing commitment on the part of Governments to take direct action against child labour. A large number of countries were seeking assistance from the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, and many countries covered by the Programme had introduced legislative reforms and adopted action plans. Considerable progress had been made in understanding the problem of child labour. As many as 250 million children throughout the world were toiling simply to survive or overcome poverty. Most had neither the time nor the opportunity for any schooling at all. Millions were sold or forcibly sent across borders for work in industry, domestic service or sex.

2. Child labour was the single most important cause of child exploitation and abuse in the world. ILO was proposing a four-point strategy involving a political commitment to the total abolition of child labour, a programme of action against child labour, international assistance to allocate more resources to fight poverty and combat the international aspects of the problem, and the adoption of a new international convention to eradicate the most intolerable forms of child labour. The draft text of the proposed convention had been prepared on the basis of replies to an ILO questionnaire from over 100 Governments and an almost equal number of employers' and workers' organizations. The scope of the draft convention would include all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, the use of children in illegal activities, and the engagement of children in any other type of work likely to jeopardize their health, safety or morals.

3. The struggle against child labour must not be compromised by protectionist forces. Global action should be based on multilateral voluntary action and moral pressure, on cooperation rather than confrontation. The globalization and liberalization of world trade must be accompanied by the observance of the fundamental rights of workers, including the prohibition of child labour, in order to create a world environment that encouraged the establishment of a common set of values.

4. **Ms. Pham Quang Vanh** (Viet Nam) said that the increasing number of children victimized by various types of child abuse was one of the most tragic situations in the world. That problem was more acute in countries with economies in transition. Her delegation welcomed the great efforts being made by many Governments and United Nations specialized agencies in addressing that problem. Since the exploitation of child labour was most prevalent in developing countries, there was a need for a new comprehensive strategy focusing on development cooperation.

5. Education was one of the key solutions, since schools created the healthiest social environment for them. A supportive role should be played by the community and the State in providing affordable education of good quality, relevant to the needs of children and their families. The social and economic policies of countries and improved employment prospects were also important.

6. Viet Nam supported the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography with regard to the role of the United Nations and other international organizations in protecting children. Cooperation between families and schools was extremely important in protecting the rights and welfare of children. In accordance with its policy in that field, her Government had recently adopted a national plan of action to provide special protection for children covering the period 1997-2000. The plan set forth clearly defined strategies to be implemented in all sectors.

7. **Mr. Enkhsaikhan** (Mongolia) expressed satisfaction with the enormous work being carried out by UNICEF and non-governmental organizations to protect and promote the basic rights of children. Like other countries undergoing radical structural changes, Mongolia was grappling with fundamental challenges. Children and adolescents constituted approximately 70 per cent of the poor in that country. His Government had drawn up a comprehensive national agenda for the development and protection of children up to the year 2000 in accordance with the recommendations of the World Summit for Children. UNICEF had assisted the National Centre for Children by enhancing its capacity to improve planning and programme implementation.

8. His delegation welcomed the International Conference on Child Labour, held in Oslo in October 1997, which had adopted an Agenda for Action, and noted with satisfaction that negotiations on a new convention dealing with exploitative child labour were under way at ILO. As a State party to the Convention, Mongolia would spare no effort to

implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In 1996, his Government had adopted a law on the protection of the rights of the child. In October 1997, the Mongolian Parliament had ratified the amendment to paragraph 2 of article 43 of the Convention, which would increase the membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 to 18. His delegation appealed to other States parties to do likewise.

9. **Mr. Rahmonov** (Turkmenistan) said that his Government recognized and respected the human dignity of every child and was committed to protecting children and other vulnerable population groups in the current phase of economic transition and restructuring. Earlier in 1997, Turkmenistan had hosted the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, convened for the purpose of defining strategies for implementing the Convention in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The participants had adopted the Ashgabat Declaration (A/52/90, annex), in which they had committed themselves to bringing up children in the spirit of the ideals of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity; asked the Presidents of the participating countries to declare 1999 the year of protection of the rights of the child; decided to establish an inter-parliamentary group of countries to devise economically effective mechanisms for providing social services to children; and noted the need to pay particular attention to education for girls, maternal mortality and children in especially difficult circumstances.

10. Turkmenistan recognized the need for a sound legislative basis and adequate budgetary resources to solve the problems of children, and was grateful to the United Nations agencies and donor countries which had supported its efforts to implement the Convention. The few countries which had not yet acceded to the Convention should do so as soon as possible.

11. His Government strongly urged all Governments to sign and ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, adopted in Oslo in September 1997. To demonstrate its commitment, Turkmenistan had hosted an international conference on anti-personnel landmines, which had emphasized the importance of banning landmines in Central Asia.

12. **Mr. Meremi** (Niger) said that the world had become convinced that children had virtually the same set of rights as adults. Thus, the international community should not only maintain its objectives for children in terms of alleviating poverty, but should also look beyond that aim to address the social protection and other important needs of children and to attack the root causes of poverty.

13. Niger had made substantial efforts to improve the education, health and legal and social protection of children. Between 1960 and 1990, enrolment in primary and secondary school had vastly increased. The aims of Niger's national plan of action for children included raising school enrolment to at least 35 per cent, increasing the percentage of girls in the educational system from 36 to 50 per cent and increasing preschool enrolment from 0.8 to at least 8 per cent. Those aims would be achieved, *inter alia*, through public awareness-raising and the setting up of an educational development fund.

14. Economic difficulties and drought-related food shortages had increased infant and child mortality rates since the 1980s. That phenomenon reflected poor health service coverage (32 per cent), an inadequate health-care system (one doctor per 75,000 people) and poor immunization coverage. By the year 2000, Niger hoped to increase immunization coverage to at least 80 per cent of children under the age of one year and to eradicate poliomyelitis. It would also undertake an intensive social mobilization campaign to combat sexually transmitted diseases, including acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Its strategies in the health sector included the promotion of community participation, the establishment of health districts, and decentralization aimed at involving communities in the management of health problems. It would also seek out, evaluate and train practitioners of traditional medicine, whose work could complement that of modern health-care professionals.

15. Niger's penal code did not recognize attenuating circumstances or allow the suspension of sentences for persons convicted of family abandonment, abduction of a minor, indecent assault, rape, procuring or incitement of a minor to immorality, sale of alcohol to a minor or facilitation of access to and consumption of drugs by a minor. However, the special juvenile courts provided for in Niger's legislation had not yet been established, for lack of adequate infrastructure.

16. Since 1993, Niger had established a number of institutions to care for orphans and children in difficult family circumstances. In the future, it planned to open a vocational training centre for minors in prison.

17. Niger would continue to implement national programmes in application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a matter of priority. It welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children and the

outcome of the Amsterdam and Oslo Conferences on child labour.

18. **Ms. Ben Yedder** (Tunisia) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the frame of reference for gauging States' commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of children. In Tunisia, the situation of children was taken into account in the elaboration of development and human resources plans. Since the country's independence, its children had benefited from a primary-health-care policy focusing on maternal and child health, access to free and compulsory education for both sexes on an equal basis, social protection and various forms of recreation to promote the harmonious development of the child's personality. Tunisia's comprehensive policy for the promotion of the family, which included a family planning component, had been strengthened over the last decade.

19. In 1991, Tunisia had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had adopted a national programme of action for children. It had designated 11 January of each year as a national children's day, and in 1995 it had instituted a presidential prize for the rights of the child, which was awarded annually to individuals, organizations, institutions and agencies that made outstanding contributions to the advancement of children's rights and well-being.

20. With respect to legislation, the country's educational reform sought to give children a sense of civic responsibility and patriotism and a culture of solidarity, and to teach them the principles of human rights and tolerance. The new Child Protection Code, adopted in November 1995, provided for a network of child-protection officers throughout the country to promote preventive action for children in difficult circumstances. The Personal Status Code had been revised to advance the rights of women and the family and to establish the primacy of the child's best interests. The Code of Criminal Procedure had been amended to promote legislation on children and to strengthen the protection of children from sexual exploitation. Lastly, a mechanism had been created to monitor the achievement of the objectives of the national programme of action for children.

21. In recent years, her Government had increased its efforts to eradicate childhood diseases through specific national maternal and child health programmes. As a result, by 1994, under-five mortality had fallen to 38 per thousand, and infant mortality to 32 per thousand.

22. To promote the development of children's personalities and individual capabilities, the Government had established a large number of kindergartens throughout the country, built many parks and recreational areas and organized various educational and activity programmes to occupy children during school vacations. Child labour was prohibited under the law ratifying ILO Convention No. 138 concerning minimum age for admission to employment.

23. The international community's efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children and to assist children in situations of armed conflict should be more vigorous and better coordinated. She welcomed the recommendations presented in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/52/482) and the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Education and information were the key to preventing that scourge. Prevention should also be emphasized in efforts to protect children from armed conflict, and should encompass economic and social development issues as well as security issues.

24. Wider public awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols would help to develop a culture of respect for children in all circumstances. The international community must address the fact that, in the 1990s, over 90 per cent of war casualties were civilians, mostly women and children. She welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children and supported his ideas on preventive action. Lastly, she applauded the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in spreading awareness and in recommending State action in relation to children's rights.

25. **Mr. Khalid** (Sudan) said that social development continued to lag behind technological and economic development in many countries and that children were most severely affected. Developing countries needed the support of the international community to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

26. In accordance with its cultural and religious values, the Sudan attached great importance to the rights of the child and had adopted a national programme and suitable legislation to implement the Convention. Education was mandatory for both boys and girls from age six, and a law had been passed to expand pre-school education. A presidential decree provided for the establishment of nursery schools in the workplace and in communities. Children's cultural centres had been set up in the major cities. Sudanese children participated, and often distinguished themselves, in international forums for children.

27. In August 1997, the Government had organized a training session on the Convention for media professionals. Consequently, the latter had adopted a code for the

dissemination of the Convention to all sectors of society. In addition, the Government was disseminating the Convention in local languages and dialects.

28. In the southern Sudan, children were being exploited, used as human shields, forcibly recruited, tortured and killed by the rebel movement. His Government strongly condemned those practices and urged the international community to emphasize the need to respect the rights of children in situations of armed conflict, *inter alia* by completing the elaboration of the relevant optional protocol. In July 1997, the Sudan had participated in a regional conference on the subject organized by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect. The decisions and recommendations of that conference were a first step towards identifying priorities for unified action to protect children, especially displaced children, child soldiers and unaccompanied refugee children.

29. The war in the southern Sudan had led to the phenomenon of street children. The Government had responded by establishing "peace villages" and homes to care for and educate such children. In an attempt to end the suffering caused by the war, the Government had signed a peace agreement with all but one of the warring factions, and was conducting high-level negotiations to try to convince the remaining faction to join the peace process.

30. The Sudanese Government was greatly concerned about unaccompanied refugee children. Every effort should be made to reunite them with their families or, at least, to ensure that they were cared for by their extended families and local communities. Efforts must also be made to end child labour, which was sometimes harmful to children's health and deprived them of education. The sale and sexual exploitation of children threatened the integrity of the social fabric, and must be combated by the entire international community. The report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the subject deserved due consideration. While national efforts to protect the rights of the child were essential, international cooperation was the only means of guaranteeing full respect for all human rights, including those of children.

31. **Ms. Younos** (Afghanistan) said that, for nearly two decades, children in her country had suffered from the state of war and the poverty resulting from the breakdown of Afghanistan's economic and social system. Many children had been induced, by either communism or Islam, to participate in the hostilities, and had learned to bear arms and defend themselves even before learning to read and write. Regrettably, the war had left them no alternative.

32. Children's education had deteriorated over the years, not only because many schools had been destroyed, but also because girls were deprived of their right to education in Taliban-occupied areas. Boys in those areas were affected as well, since female teachers were not allowed to exercise their profession. The Talibans' reactionary view of religion ignored the fact that Islamic law strongly emphasized the importance of education for both boys and girls. The fact that about 70 per cent of the children in Taliban-occupied areas were not being educated threatened to create a generation of illiterates.

33. Afghanistan had been devastated by 17 years of war. Children were being deprived of their right to education and social development, and even of their right to life. Many children had been crippled or blinded by anti-personnel landmines or bombardments, with the result that Afghanistan had more handicapped children than any other country. Malnutrition and the lack of medical care claimed the lives of children every day. Psychologically traumatized by the war, Afghan children had come to believe that they were unlikely to survive beyond the age of 15.

34. Afghanistan was sincerely grateful to UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), non-governmental organizations and donor countries for assisting child victims of the war. It was essential to safeguard the right of the child to health, nutrition, education, physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration. Her delegation wished to co-sponsor the draft resolution to be introduced on the rights of the child, which dealt with the situation of children affected by armed conflict. She hoped that one day, the fear and despair of such children would be turned to joy.

35. **Mr. Holmes** (Canada) said that, while much had been accomplished in addressing the problems of child labour, street children and the sale and exploitation of children, tremendous efforts were still required. In the area of child labour, there was a growing determination to end practices that exploited children. Forms of child labour which deprived children of their right to realize their potential and which exposed them to hazardous conditions contravened human rights.

36. Canada supported the initiative of ILO in developing a new convention to eradicate the most intolerable forms of child labour, and commended ILO and the Governments of the Netherlands and Norway for the commitment they had shown in addressing that global challenge. Canada was a contributor to the ILO International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour; its contribution was being used to develop and implement training in and use of practices for

the reduction and elimination of child labour, in concert with other committed countries.

37. Canada had also launched a child-labour challenge fund to support private-sector initiatives aimed at addressing exploitive child labour internationally. The Canadian Government would provide matching funds to the private sector to support initiatives such as voluntary guidelines, codes of conduct and product-labelling practices.

38. The almost universal adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child testified to the importance the international community placed on the promotion and protection of the rights of children. That success had placed considerable demands on the Committee on the Rights of the Child in terms of its capacity to review the reports of States parties. Canada therefore supported the amendment of the Convention to increase the membership of the Committee to 18.

39. The adoption of an optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was an extremely important objective. The World Customs Organization had recently accepted a Canadian recommendation to recognize child pornography as contraband, and to develop policies and strategies to deal with such materials with particular emphasis on problems posed by electronic transmission. Canada had adopted provisions for the prosecution of Canadians involved in the sexual exploitation of children in other countries. Canada supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and particularly welcomed the Special Rapporteur's work concerning the media and the Internet.

40. His Government had recently ratified the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-Country Adoption, which, together with the associated system of cooperation among States, would help to prevent abduction and sale of, and trafficking in, children. Canada was also carefully examining its defence legislation in order to be in a position to ratify a future protocol on children affected by armed conflict, and welcomed the appointment of a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children, who would be able to play an important role as advocate for children in such situations.

41. Minefields killed or maimed an estimated 25,000 people a year; most of them were civilians, and many were children. As a result of its long involvement in peacekeeping missions, Canada was well aware of the lasting and devastating effects of landmines. His delegation welcomed the recent adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on Their Destruction, and looked forward to the launching of the second phase of the campaign, a broad effort to remove the millions of mines in the ground and provide assistance to victims and nations coping with the devastating effects of those weapons.

42. **Mr. Tessema** (Ethiopia) said that the future of any country, developed or developing, depended on the upbringing of its children. It was unthinkable on the part of any developing country to expect future success and development in economic, political and social terms without giving due attention to the welfare of its children. The first challenge confronting Africa was to do away with malnutrition, disease, child labour, illiteracy and the scourge of armed conflicts, which were eroding the unity and cohesion of its peoples and undermining the fundamental rights of all, particularly those of children. All children were entitled to enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms, and to grow up in an atmosphere of peace, love and care.

43. As a follow-up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, his Government had implemented concrete measures to promote and protect the rights of children. Committees on the rights of the child had been set up at national, regional and local levels, and a high-level ministerial committee had also been established. Special attention was being given to the health needs of the family, particularly those of women and children, and a new education policy had set the goal of doubling primary-school enrolment to reach 50 per cent by the year 2000. The rights of minority groups were given special consideration; primary education was offered in several languages, and the Convention had been translated into eight languages and widely distributed. The Government had organized various workshops, conferences and campaigns, including a campaign to fight the spread of AIDS, under which 260 anti-AIDS youth clubs had been formed in schools to carry out educational activities, panel discussions and radio broadcasts on the subject of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

44. A national committee on traditional practices was undertaking multifaceted activities to eradicate all forms of harmful traditional practices affecting the health and well-being of children and women, with specific emphasis on female genital mutilation. A workshop had been conducted in December 1996 to publicize the results of a study on child abuse and neglect; a workshop on the problems of street children had also been convened, and a pilot project was being conducted in five selected police stations in Addis Ababa, aimed at protecting children from being detained with adults and hard-core criminals, and to improve the treatment of children by members of the police.

45. In a world of diversity and disparity, children were a unifying force capable of bringing people to a common ethical ground. The international community should strive towards ensuring the spread of meaningful democracy and developing and strengthening the culture of conflict resolution. Ethiopia had suffered for many years from internal conflict, resulting in large numbers of unaccompanied, orphaned and abandoned children, and many displaced people and child refugees. Ethiopia had made considerable efforts to repatriate refugees and create the necessary conditions to allow them to lead normal and peaceful lives. A conference had been organized in Addis Ababa in July 1997 on the theme of children in situations of armed conflict in Africa.

46. His delegation welcomed progress in the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention, aimed at enhancing the protection of children's rights in situations of armed conflict. The optional protocol must set firm and unequivocal international standards, and he called upon countries whose current practice did not meet such standards to cooperate and show flexibility in the spirit of the Convention.

47. His Government would continue tirelessly to implement the goals and provisions of the Convention.

48. **Mrs. Khuhro** (Pakistan) said that children were humanity's most important asset, and the source of inspiration for endeavours to build a better future. Yet they were one of the most vulnerable sections of society, exposed to all forms of exploitation, of which child labour was the most widespread. Child labour often caused irreparable damage to children's personality and hampered their physical, intellectual and psychological development. Poverty, under-development and illiteracy were obvious causes of the prevalence of child labour. In many countries, poor families could not afford to pay for their children's education; that in turn diminished chances of social advancement for those children in later years, since they never acquired the necessary knowledge to qualify for skilled employment. That perpetuated the vicious cycle of economic deprivation, illiteracy and child labour. Children who were most commonly subjected to the most intolerable forms of child labour, such as slavery and bonded labour, mostly came from population groups which were not only economically vulnerable but also culturally and socially disadvantaged.

49. High rates of infant mortality and malnutrition, and lack of adequate health care, educational facilities and opportunities for the development of their full potential were among the basic causes of violations of the rights of children. The girl child was particularly vulnerable; she was neglected and discriminated against, owing to cultural attitudes which gave preference to boys. The girl child was also exposed to all kinds of abuse and exploitation. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had rightly focused attention on the importance of the media and education in the fight against child labour; they were key tools which should be used for the empowerment and advancement of children and the elimination of all forms of child abuse and exploitation. Special attention must be given to educational needs, ensuring that every child had access to free and compulsory education. That would go a long way to rescuing them from the scourge of child labour and other forms of exploitation. The girl child needed special attention, since women played the pivotal role in the development of healthy traditions in any society.

50. Her Government had recently withdrawn reservations concerning the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and national laws were being reviewed to bring them into consonance with the Convention. Pakistan had imposed stringent punishments for violators of the rights of the child, especially the girl child. Crimes against children such as sexual abuse, torture and forced labour, and offences resulting in death or disability, could entail capital punishment. All laws on child labour were being brought into conformity with the relevant ILO conventions. The Constitution prohibited slavery in any form, and the engagement of children in any factory or mine or hazardous employment was forbidden, as was the employment of children under 14 in specified areas. The Government was also adopting measures to eradicate bonded labour.

51. It was not enough to free children from work; they must be offered hope for the future. Her Government had prepared a comprehensive programme for the rehabilitation of child workers; 35 centres had been established for that purpose, to cater for their basic education, training, health care and recreation.

52. Neglect, abuse and exploitation of children could shatter dreams for a peaceful and prosperous world in the twenty-first century. Liberal investment in the health, education and development of children was needed to prepare them for a prosperous and harmonious future. She called upon the international community to pledge to take immediate action towards that goal.

53. **Mrs. Smolcic** (Uruguay) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by Paraguay on behalf of the Rio Group. The countries of that Group had participated in the preparation of draft resolutions currently

before the Committee on the subject of children affected by armed conflict and the eradication of the sale of children and their sexual exploitation. Such problems were complex and interrelated, and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States had proposed that they should be treated as a single topic, into which specific issues could be incorporated. Other priorities which had been identified included the plight of street children, the exploitation of child labour, refugee and internally displaced children, children with disabilities and the girl child, as well as the need for implementation by States of existing norms.

54. Her delegation reiterated its concern about the need to find a rapid and enduring solution to the suffering of children in armed conflicts, and assured the Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children of its firm support. It also reaffirmed its commitment to the recently adopted Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, the implementation of which would help to avert the suffering caused by the use of such weapons.

55. Uruguay had strongly supported action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, particularly with reference to sexual tourism, the legal responsibilities of countries of origin and destination, and the creation of national and international networks for the exchange of information. His delegation hoped for a rapid and successful conclusion of the work of preparing the two draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the current delays in reaching agreement were a matter of great concern. The promotion and protection of the rights of children and their implementation deserved the dedication of the international community; it was high time that the international obligations undertaken by Governments under the various instruments were put into practice.

56. **Mr. Young Sam Ma** (Republic of Korea) said that the international community must take concerted and sustained action to ensure the safety and well-being of children, particularly in armed conflicts, and should support the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflicts, which was currently being elaborated. He welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, whose important work had his country's full support.

57. Strong political will at both the national and international levels was essential in order to halt the sexual exploitation of minors. His delegation highly commended the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and supported the recommendations on the role of education and the media in her report (A/52/482). The optional protocol to the Convention on that question should be finalized as soon as possible.

58. In view of the magnitude of the child labour problem, the Republic of Korea welcomed the efforts of the International Labour Office to initiate discussion of a new convention aimed at eradicating the most intolerable forms of child labour. He stressed that the fundamental solution to the problem of child labour lay in the elimination of poverty. Education was another essential preventive measure to counter the economic exploitation of children. Governments should make it a high priority to provide children with cost-free and unrestricted primary education. The Republic of Korea had recently raised the minimum working age and prohibited the employment of those under 18 years of age in hazardous work.

59. The rights of the girl child warranted particular attention. That serious issue required urgent, effective and coordinated action on the part of Governments, non-governmental organizations and the media.

60. Lastly, he underscored the importance of the family unit in protecting and promoting children's rights. As the future of humanity, children must be ensured their rightful place as successors to the coming millennium.

61. **Mr. Saleh** (Bahrain) said that an unprecedented number of States had demonstrated their support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 191 States now having ratified or acceded to it. Nevertheless, it was extremely disturbing that, on the verge of the twenty-first century, as many as 15 per cent of the world's children lived in conditions of extreme hardship.

62. That included 100 million children who were being exploited or employed in hazardous work, 50 million living on the streets, and more than 100 million being mistreated or neglected in institutions. A further 20 million children were refugees or displaced persons, many of them psychologically or physically disabled as a result of armed conflict or natural disaster. Statistics also showed that 1.5 million children had died in the past decade as a direct result of war. For every child killed, there were another three injured, debilitated or psychologically scarred. His delegation therefore welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children in armed conflict.

63. His delegation supported the work of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale

of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It was imperative to devise further legal guarantees in that field.

64. Bahrain attached great importance to children as the young people of the future. It had made good progress in promoting the rights of the child, particularly in the fields of education and health. For instance, the mortality rate of children under five years old had fallen to 20 per 1,000, far lower than the average in developing countries, and many child-care institutions had been established.

65. He commended efforts to promote the rights of the child made by the United Nations and its relevant specialized agencies, particularly UNICEF. He urged the international community to make even greater efforts in order to promote the concept of the rights of the child.

66. **Ms. Gligorova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the transition to a market-based economy had adversely affected the enjoyment of social and economic rights by all citizens in her country, including children. Efforts were being made to improve the situation of children as a matter of priority. To achieve that goal, ongoing assistance by the international community was required.

67. Attention should focus on eliminating poverty and all types of child abuse and then on creating conditions enabling children to have a happy childhood and harmonious development. All States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child must make the necessary effort to ensure its implementation. In that regard, she underscored her Government's support for work currently under way on the preparation of the optional protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and of the optional protocol on children in armed conflict.

The meeting rose at noon.